FYEP 101 and 221 Assessment // 2019-2020 Final Report

This report includes two assessment summaries, one for FYEP 101 and another for ENGL 221 Research and Writing, which was offered as an option for students who arrived at PLU with more writing experience. We did not assess FYEP 190 in the 2019-20 academic year because a) no changes in the course/program would presumably result in data similar to what we've seen over the last few years (which have been generally unchanged), and b) we anticipate a change to this course in Spring 2022 following a Spring 2021 pilot course.

FYEP 101 Assessment Summary Statement

Due the COVID19 pandemic--and the requirement that we work remotely--the assessment committee completed this assessment asynchronously over two weeks at the end of spring semester (May 12 to May 28). The assessment process developed over three steps: 1) a 1-hour Zoom norming session during which we calibrated sample papers, 2) a two week asynchronous scoring period in which raters scored a randomized selection of sample common assignments from across Writing 101 section (see more on process below), and 3) a 1-hour Zoom debrief during which we discussed the papers and the scoring process. Our scores were as follows:

	MEAN	ST DEV	MEDIAN	MODE
LO 1: Rhetorical Situation	3.16	0.87	3	3
LO 5: Writing- Reading Connection	2.87	1.15	3	2

Fig. 1 2019-20 FYEP 101 Assessment Results

	Percentage of Students Excelling (scoring 5 or above)	Percentage of Students Achieving (scoring 3 or above)
LO 1: Rhetorical Situation	7.5%	87%
LO 5: Writing- Reading Connection	15%	70%

Fig. 2 2019-20 Writing 101 Percentage of Students Achieving or Exceeding Standards

Learning Outcome #5 was redesigned in 2015-16 but has not been singled out for assessment in the years since. Learning Outcome #1 was also revised in 2015-16 and was last assessed in 2017-18. As such, we can compare 2019-20 data to previous years.

Our rating of LO #1 show an increase of .19 in the mean score from 2.97 in 2017-18 to 3.16 in 2019-20. More telling, the percentage of students scoring at the "achieving" level has increased from 60% in 2017-18 to 87% in 2019-20, while the percentage of students scoring at the "excelling" level has increased from 3.5% to 7.5%.

We attribute this increase to investment in the assessment process via the redesign of the common assignment prompt. Anecdotally, faculty tell us the prompt is more clear and more transparent in what it is calling on students to do. However, the more significant factor is likely the change in assessment scoring institute in 2018-19 when we began reading both the final reflective common assignment and the evidence paper explained in/by the student's reflective writing. By examining two texts, one designed for

personal reflection and self evaluation, another more authentic to the work the student will have done in/for the class, we gain greater insight into the students authentic abilities.

Notably, for both LO #1 and #5 there was (as there was last year) a sense among the committee that these papers were "better" than in previous years.

FYEP 101 Assessment Conclusions and Recommendations

Our discussion led to a number of valuable insights. These conclusions and recommendations can be bundled into two categories: Program Design and the Assessment Process itself.

Program Design

The rating committee identified that the openness of our FYEP curriculum is both an area of strength and a significant challenge for programmatic assessment. Specifically, they noted two forms of incoherence that make it difficult to determine how well the program is actually working.

Having courses deliver many different writing genres from many fields/themes can make consistency a challenge. Accurate measures are difficult if every course is doing things differently, even if they are teaching to the same outcomes/expectations. In the case of genres that aren't traditionally academic (e.g., reflections, narratives, and/or professional documents), the common assignment will demonstrate some of those strategies we want to see in student writing. However, this falls on the instructor to help students understand what their evidence paper is demonstrating and what it is not, and then encouraging them to use the common assignment to show diverse forms of learning in line with the program learning outcomes.

In addition to differences of content, we noted substantive differences in delivery. FYEP 101 instructors interpret the core learning outcomes differently. Importantly, we have made great strides as a program for bringing design coherence to FYEP 101 courses. Our annual syllabus review reveals that 101 syllabi are increasingly consistent in terms of general requirements

- 96% of 101 syllabi include the FYEP 101 Learning Goals
- 100% of 101 syllabi include a clear list of assignments with explanation of their course value
- 100% of 101 syllabi include the common assignment and give it at least 15% of the course value
- 92% of 101 courses require peer review
- 96% of 101 courses provide students with multiple (and ongoing) opportunities to write
- 100% of 101 courses require students to write in multiple genres

This continuity signals major progress. However, we have room to improve in the details that underwrite these course elements. In that same review, we note that 40% of course syllabi explain the purpose of the FYEP course/program and few courses make explicit connection between the learning goals and the courses assignments, though this may occur in individual assignment prompts.

Program Design Action Items:
FYEP leadership can continue to support transparent syllabus and prompt writing by promoting TILT methodology in FYEP 101 faculty development. Specifically, we can urge instructors to clearly link learning goals to activities so students have an easier time explaining them at the end of the term

FYEP leadership can support curricular coherence by clarifying how we understand and teach particular aspects of program goals. We have options for how we might proceed:

- We can engage instructors in discussion about outcomes and expectations to arrive at consensus;
- We can ask students to explain--via their common assignment--the disciplinary expectations working in their papers (this will need to be taught in class);
- We can be more intentional about having faculty focus on interdisciplinary thinking/writing strategies rather than becoming too bogged down in disciplinary norms and content concerns (e.g., de-emphasize research and emphasize working with sources).

Assessment Process

Recent changes to the assessment process, specifically the inclusion of both the common assignment and the evidence paper, seem to offer a clearer sense for what we know about student learning in our classrooms. Raters noted that they felt they could see student learning in more detail across two distinctly different writing samples. Additionally, rater comments are much more focused on student writing than they have been in the past.

The common assignment prompt is much more focused on reflection--and offers tips for faculty teaching reflective writing--but the nature of this reflection may not be entirely clear. There are two potential problems. First, if we don't agree on the meaning that underwrites the language of the learning outcomes, we will have trouble consistently prompting sound reflection. This was most prominent re: LO #5 in this assessment. Students varied greatly in their ability to explain the connection between reading and writing. Additionally, raters struggled to score consistently because of the wide range of disciplinary approaches to source use/integration. Second, the language of the outcomes is faculty focused. The tool was designed solely for assessment, but should be accessible to students (for use in self-evaluation).

Assessment Process Action Items:
FYEP leadership can continue to aid faculty in supporting reflection by developing/supplementing our common assignment prompts materials. Specifically, we need to clarify (for students and faculty) what is being described in the outcomes and the outcomes rubric. That is, we need to make the outcomes and rubric more student-friendly. This will clarify our expectations and provide a language for students to use when describing their own learning.

FYEP leadership can amplify consensus building in the design of courses and in assessment norming. At the very least, our program design/evaluation tools (e.g., the outcomes, the outcomes rubric) should be contextualized with key terms and definitions.

An additional priority: Last year we decided (and this year we agreed) that we will need to triangulate assessment data in order to understand how students are experiencing the course and the assessment. More specifically, we want to know the extent to which our Common Assignment Assessment favors particular students based on prior knowledge/experience. Further, we question if our rubric, as designed, validates student voices/experiences or if it calls on them to conform. We have discussed the following strategies for triangulation:
- Surveying students about their impressions of the course and the common assignment; ideally a pre-and post-survey might be implemented to capture change over time.

FYEP 101 Assessment Scoring Process

We had 32 sections of Writing 101 in the 2019-20 academic year. 302 students (from a possible 456) submitted their final common assignment to the FYEP-Gen Ed 2019-20 database. Two students were selected from every course that submitted at least 25% of their common assignments.The total test sample size was 58 students, or 58 paper pairs. Paper pairs include the common assignment and the evidence paper. Paper pairings from each course were selected using a random number generator. In the event a randomly selected paper was missing, the next paper in alphabetical order for the course was selected. Papers were downloaded, names were redacted. Each paper received a unique code for use in scoring and data collection. This code is known only to the assessment coordinator.

Our scoring group consisted of ten volunteer readers. Prior to scoring, we conducted a calibration session to arrive at agreed standards and goals for evaluation. Two papers were selected by the assessment coordinator for calibration. These papers were distributed, along with the assessment rubric, via email prior to our Zoom norming session on May 12, 2020. At the meeting, scores were generated by the group using the Writing 101 rubric (for LOs 1 and 5 only), followed by conversation among the raters. When we generally agreed that we had consistency within one whole number we considered the committee calibrated.

Papers were assigned randomly to scorers. Each rater received 10 paper pairs (e.g., common assignment and evidence paper). Each paper pairing was scored using a google form set up for the purpose. Scorers filled out 4 fields: student code, score for LO1, score for LO5, and then comments (which were optional). These sheets were compiled by a table leader. Each paper was read twice by two different raters, their scores were averaged to arrive at a final score for the paper. Rater agreement was very high (90%) with only 6 papers (from a total of 58) seeing a scoring difference of more than one whole number.

After scoring and aggregating data, the committee met for approximately 1 hour to identify what, if anything, we learned from completing the assessment. Additionally, we considered what, if anything, we'd like to see changed in our common assignment assessment process. Our guiding questions were:

- What surprised you about these student papers?
- What trends did you see? What do you think these trends suggest about what students know or do not know?
- What problems do you find in/with the rubric or common assignment prompt? What moments are confusing or in need of development or revision?

ENGL 221 Assessment Summary Statement

This year we ran two sections of ENGL 221 as a pilot option for PLU students who arrive with at least 30 college-level credits but who desire a writing-intensive course to help them adapt to expectations at PLU. We have 21 students enroll in two sections of this course. These students represent a range of disciplinary alignments, but Nursing students constitute the vast majority.

Given that this was a pilot year, we anticipated conducting substantive assessment in three forms: a student survey, a course reflection, and direct assessment of student writing (this last component as part of the regular FYEP 101 common assignment assessment). We successfully delivered the survey and both sections completed a reflection assignment, but the course instructors were not able to discuss them in the spring (due to the COVID19 campus closure) and the end-of-year common assignment assessment committee was small enough that the additional papers could have distracted from the 101 assessment. As such, we are reporting here on the survey data only (our n=14 of 21 possible students).

The majority of our enrolled students self-identified as Running Start, with all but two having completed at least one college-level composition/writing course. Many had completed the 101 and 102 composition sequence common at many schools. Further, 85% had completed the 30 credit hours required to skip the first-year writing course.

Generally, the students who took the survey reported that they had a positive experience in ENGL 221. Importantly, the majority were pretty confident writers when they arrived. Of the 14 surveyed, 5 said, "yes," they felt confident that their previous college writing experience had prepared them for PLU. Another 5 said they felt "somewhat" confident. The remaining 4 were either not confident or hadn't taken a previous college level course.

Further questions polled their sense of their own abilities before and after ENGL 221.

Rate how you thought about yourself as a writer when you arrived at PLU with 1 being "very poor, 5 being "average," and 10 being "excellent":
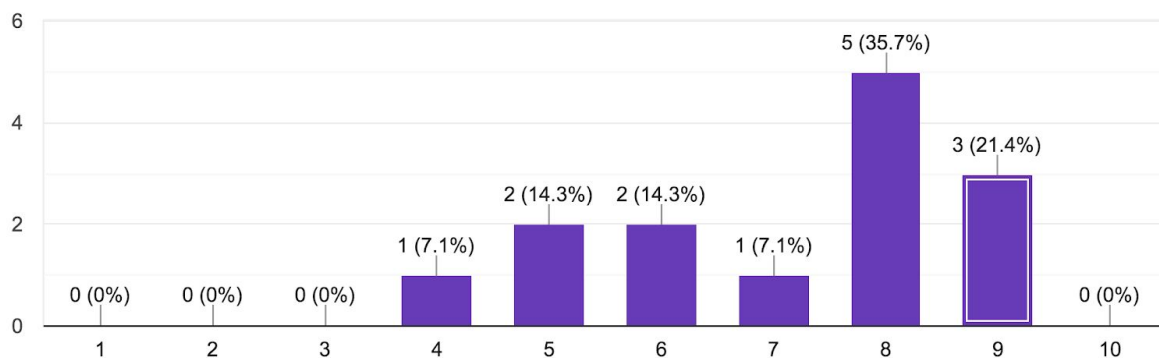
14 responses

Rate how you think about yourself as a writer having just about completed ENGL 221 writing at PLU with 1 being "very poor, 5 being "average," and 10 being "excellent":
14 responses
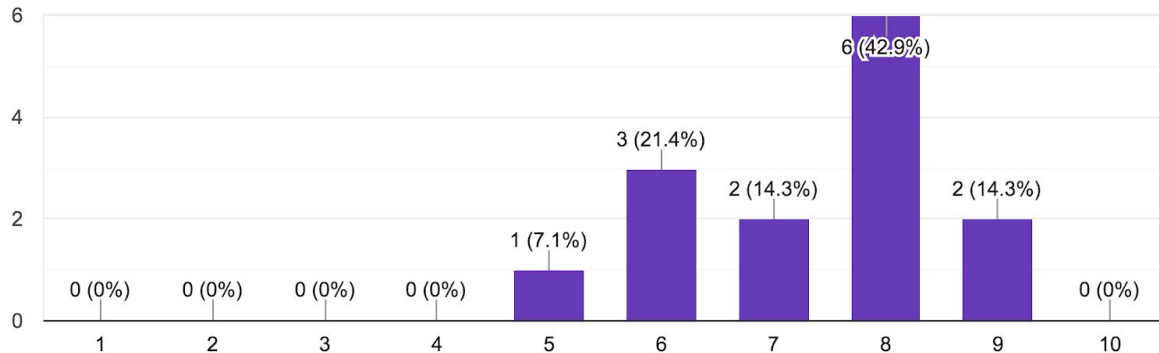
Two of the students who initially scored themselves at an 8 or 9 dropped, the others remained consistent. All of the students who scored themselves below a 6 prior to the course, left it feeling more confident.

Suggests we've done a good job of building confidence and capacity in less prepared students and destabilizing some assumptions about good writing for the more confident writers. The data also suggests that there are a few students who were confident and remind confident, begging the question of whether they need the course (importantly, all of those students report having a good experience).

The students surveyed pointed the following as they favorite characteristics of the ENGL 221 course:
- An emphasis on process
- Peer review and peer workshops
- A focus on purpose and rhetorical situation (instead of abstracted "rules" for writing)

Importantly, the recurring theme in what they liked about their previous writing course(s) was flexibility, the freedom to choose topics and genres.

Quotes from student surveys
I feel as if this course has prepared me to be a better writer in the future! I had many different writing experiences than I did in previous courses and I got to look at things from a different perspective, which was very good for me.

I think this course has prepared me to express my ideas more effectively.

I think it prepared me a lot and helped me develop as a writer who can write beneficial and informative essays.

It has taught me how to synthesize ideas in an organized way.

> *It helped me learn how to write a better paper and how to improve personally as a writer. I learned that I need to clarify my sentences and paragraphs so readers can understand what I am talking about.*
>
> *I am much better at finding good research now.*
>
> *I feel that this course has done a fantastic job of preparing me to read, write, and do research in my major of choice by teaching me how to annotate and break down reading and being able to incorporate that reading into an argumentative writing piece.*

ENGL 221 Assessment Conclusions and Recommendations

If FYEP adopts Directed Self Placement in the future, allowing students to choose 101 or 221 based on their level of preparation, it does seem important to provide an "out" in the form of a portfolio. Students do arrive with the requisite skills to skip this writing requirement. Ethically, we need to ensure they can do so in a manner that is convenient and inexpensive.

Students who complete college-level writing courses prior to their arrival at PLU arrive with a wide range of preparation. We need to ensure that the ENGL 221 course provides adequate scaffolding for students who arrive less prepared and adequate challenge for those who arrive more prepared.

We should continue with the classroom practices that have been the hallmark of FYEP for years: a focus on process, substantive peer review, and an emphasis on the purpose and context of writing instead of abstracted rules.

We should consider assignments and activities that provide more confident writers more autonomy in topic and/or genre selection.